

Schools author wins award

Pasi Sahlberg
gets Grawemeyer

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Finland has become a mecca of education reform, with hundreds of educators from across the globe flocking to the northern European country each year looking for ways to improve their schools.

How has a country with a population of 5.4 million people become the centerpiece of school improvement?

"The main driver of steady progress of our school system since the 1970s has been consistent emphasis on enhancing equity, not academic excellence, in our school system," said Pasi Sahlberg, a Finnish educator, school improvement activist and author.



**Pasi
Sahlberg**

He explains more in his book — "Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?" — that has earned him the 2013 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Education and its \$100,000 prize.

Sahlberg said he visited Louisville in 1997 to learn more about the Kentucky Education Reform Act when "we were actively making major reforms in our school system."

"American education and many of its innovation in teaching and learning have inspired Finnish school reforms during the last three decades," he said.

Sahlberg, who directs the country's Centre for International Mobility and Cooperation, said a decision by elected officials, social experts and policymakers in the 1970s to team up on education reform was critical in Finland's rise as an academic superstar.

"All major political parties have endorsed the idea of equality of educational opportunity and equity in our school system as the basic values," he said. "I have learned that this is where Finland is very different to the U.S., for example. Over-politicizing education seems to be one of

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the obstacles to more sustainable education reforms in the U.S.”

Diane Kyle, an education professor at the University of Louisville, said there is a lot to learn from Sahlberg's work and experience. “Finland's approach to education reform contradicts just about everything the world is doing right now to improve student performance,” she said. “It shows we must address student inequality before we can expect student excellence.”

Sahlberg said one thing the American education system can learn from Finland is having “much less standardized testing by removing some tests or replacing them with sample-based tests, and relying more on schools' and teachers' assessments of students' learning.”

“States spend increasing amounts of the education budgets for testing and less on improving people who work in schools,” he

GRAWEMEYER AWARDS

H. Charles Grawemeyer, an industrialist and philanthropist, established the awards at the University of Louisville in 1984 with a \$9 million endowment. The awards recognize powerful ideas in five fields. The winners, chosen from nominations from around the world, receive \$100,000.

Grawemeyer was a Louisville native and chemical engineering graduate of U of L. He rose to become chairman of Reliance Universal, an international coatings company, before retiring and starting his own company in Shelbyville, Ky. He died in 1993.

Music composition: Michel van der Aa

World order: University of Denver assistant professor Erica Chenoweth and State Department foreign affairs officer Maria Stephan

Psychology: Irving Gottesman

Education: Pasi Sahlberg

Religion: Friday

said. “Finland does the opposite.”

Sahlberg was a teacher, teacher trainer and adviser to the Finnish Board of Education before joining the World Bank in Washington, D.C., and the European Commission in Turin, Italy. He has spoken around the world about the need to find effective ways to reform education.

He said the Grawemeyer “is a huge honor ... to be recognized for some-

thing that goes so deep into our culture and everyday life. This award will help me to have some more time to write more about public education,” he said. “My next book will look at Finnish solutions to schools, districts and states in other countries. I hope I can spend more time now to work together with educators in the U.S.”

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